

Job Search Correspondence



Career Services

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COVER LETTERS

Cover letters are used to introduce yourself to an employer, state your interest in an organization or specific vacancy, draw attention to your resume and motivate the reader to interview you. Cover letters are sent with your resume. It is important to try to send a cover letter when possible even if you are emailing your resume.

Typically, employers will scan the resume first then return to the cover letter to evaluate your writing style. Because it is so important, the cover letter deserves your best efforts. A neat, concise, well-written letter will improve your chances of getting the job you want.

FOLLOW-UP LETTERS

Follow-up letters or thank you letters are an essential part of the job search process. It is important to send a letter after each interview. Letters can also be sent to an employer after a significant phone conversation or after a brief networking meeting. Job seekers often overlook sending these letters. However, they can make a significant difference in the job search and provide you with an opportunity to reiterate important information discussed with an employer.

EFFECTIVE LETTER WRITING GUIDELINES

Use an Accepted Business Format

The most common format used today is the full-block style. The sample letters provided with this article are written in full-block style.

Personalize the Letter

Address the letter to a specific individual using his/her name, title (Dr., Ms. Mr., etc.) and position with the organization (Director of Human Resources, etc.). You may have to contact the organization to get the necessary information. You may also obtain this information through networking or through an on-line search.

Use Non-Sexist Language

If a contact person is not listed in the job description, do not assume that the hiring manager has a particular gender by opening the letter with "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam", instead, "Dear Director of Human Resources" or "Dear Hiring Official" is appropriate.

Limit Your Letter to One Page

To ensure that your letter is no more than one page, write clearly and concisely, and avoid using unnecessary words and phrases. Margins may be set at no less than ½ inch (top, bottom, left and right).

Use the same font as your resume; the smallest font size you should use is 9 point.

Use the "You" Attitude

When writing employment letters, job seekers overuse "I." Reword sentences using the "You" attitude and eliminate excessive occurrences of "I" by using "my" and "me." For example, "I have enclosed a copy of my resume" becomes "Enclosed you will find a copy of my resume." As a general rule, try to use "I" only twice per paragraph.

Vary Your Writing

Adding variety to your letters makes them more interesting and easy to read. Try to offset long sentences with short sentences. Using transitional words and phrases helps ideas flow together easily. Varying sentence structure also assists in creating an effective letter.

Use Action Verbs and Adjectives

When describing yourself and your qualifications, use adjectives and action verbs.

Tailor Your Letters

Overall, it is not effective to use the same text in your letter to apply for different jobs. It is important to change your letter to best suit each position and to highlight your skills and qualifications for that specific job and/or employer.

Proofread for Errors

To proofread for spelling errors, read the letter backward—from end to beginning. Remember that spell check may not find a word that is spelled correctly but is misused. To proofread for grammatical errors, proofread from beginning to end. Have someone else check your letter also.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- Keep a copy of every letter you send along with the job description and make notes about how and when you intend to follow-up.
- Look at the sample letters provided. However, do not copy the sample letters to save time; write your letters yourself and make your work original.
- Use a laser quality printer for your letters and print them on the same paper as your resume.
- Read books on job search correspondence. Several are available in the Career Services resource library and in most public libraries. You may also use online resources.
- Remember to sign your letters.
- Schedule an appointment to discuss your letters with a Career Services staff member.

Contents of the Cover Letter

Applicant's Address
City, State Zip

Date of Letter

Hiring Official's Name
Title
Organization
Address
City, State Zip

Salutation: (If possible, address the letter to a specific person.)

First Paragraph: State the reason for the letter. If you are writing a letter of application, state the specific position for which you are applying and indicate where you learned about the position (Career Services, news media, friend, employment service, newspaper). State why you are interested in the position and why you want to work for this organization. If you are writing a letter of inquiry, define the type of position you are seeking and explain why you are interested in working for that organization. While writing either type of letter, try to attract the employer's attention in an interesting yet professional manner.

Second Paragraph: Refer to your resume. Summarize your qualifications without detailing the information provided in your resume. If you know the requirements for the position, try to outline how your education and experience qualify you for the position. Please note that you may combine the elements of the second and third paragraph. This may be useful if you are emailing your cover letter and resume.

Third Paragraph: Provide supporting evidence of your qualifications. You can do this by describing specific accomplishments or highlighting skills you have developed through work experience, course work, campus or community involvement, or other activities. Make every effort to connect your qualifications to the job requirements.

*** The second and third paragraph may be combined.**

Final Paragraph: Establish a flow of action that produces a positive response. Suggest what you want the reader to do or what action you plan to take. Thank the employer. Repeat your telephone number and offer any assistance to help in a speedy response. Remember that the most important purpose of this letter is to motivate the employer to interview you.

Sincerely,

(Your Signature)

Your Typewritten Name

Enclosure

Sample Cover Letter

XYZ Lane
St. Louis, MO 60000

August 1, 2006

Ms. Patricia M. Benjamin
Director of Human Resources
ABC Company
555 Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60606

Dear Ms. Benjamin:

This letter is in response to the Training Specialist position advertised in the July 31st edition of the Chicago Tribune. I am confident that my qualifications for this position merit your consideration.

As you can see from my resume, I recently obtained my bachelor's degree in communications from Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri. While this degree has provided me with a strong background in communication theory, it has also given me the opportunity to demonstrate my abilities through practical experience.

As a Training Department Intern with IBM, I was responsible for a new computer software education program. This project allowed me to develop and refine my training and organizational skills while designing a program to teach basic software applications to users with limited experience working with computers. The success of this program has been so overwhelming that IBM has integrated it into the new staff training course.

Although the enclosed resume outlines my education and experience, I would appreciate the opportunity to demonstrate in an interview my knowledge of employee training and development, initiative, and interpersonal skills. I will be contacting you by telephone next week to discuss your needs and my qualifications. If you have any questions before that time, please contact me at 314-555-5555. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Green

Thomas F. Green

Enclosure

Contents of the Follow-up Letter

Applicant's Address
City, State Zip

Date of Letter

Interviewer's Name/Networking Contact Name
Title
Organization
Address
City, State Zip

Salutation:

First Paragraph: Express appreciation to the reader. If you are sending a follow-up letter after an interview, tell the reader where the interview was conducted, what position you interviewed for, the day and date of the interview, and any other relevant information. If you are sending a follow-up letter after a significant networking meeting, remind the reader about the day and date of the meeting, discuss your interest in the company, and provide any additional information.

Second Paragraph: Express continued interest in the position or company and briefly match your qualifications to the position or company.

Third Paragraph: Indicate your willingness to provide additional information to support your qualifications. End the letter with a friendly, professional close.

Sincerely,

(Your Signature)

Your Typewritten Name

Sample Follow-up Letter

XYZ Lane
St. Louis, MO 60000

August 1, 2006

Ms. Jill Myers
Director of Human Resources
Retailers Plus
240 North Grand Blvd., Suite 3000
St. Louis, MO 63104

Dear Ms. Myers:

Thank you for taking time to meet with me today to discuss the management trainee position currently available at Retailers Plus. I would like to extend my thanks to your entire staff for making me feel comfortable during the interview.

After interviewing with you and the most recent management trainee class, I am even more convinced that my education, experience and skills are well-suited for the management trainee program. While the hours may be long and the work demanding, I am energized by the potential challenges and rewards a career in retailing has to offer.

Should you have any questions concerning my qualifications, please contact me at 314-353-1254. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kathleen M. Armstrong

Kathleen M. Armstrong